

2020  
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# Archival Policy in Rail- Related Memory Institutions



# Introduction

The development of a strong archival policy framework is one of the most reliable ways to maintain an orderly, logical and user-friendly archival collection. As Laura A. Millar sets down in *Archives: Principles and Practices*:

*... the archivist in charge of an archival operation can and should be directly responsible for the development of core policies that define the scope, mandate and duties of her institution. All archival institutions need to establish and maintain a strong policy framework. No matter whether the facility is corporate or community based, institutionally oriented or focused on collections, the institution should be identified as a formal, sustainable programme, not a special project or time-limited initiative. [1]*

It has been widely established that harmful archival practices such as the unnecessary disposal of valuable records can come about as a result of a failure to establish formal archival policies. Especially in an organisation where much of the records management work is carried out by volunteers with no formal qualifications, detailed and widely available policies concerning archival collection, appraisal, deaccessioning, preservation and access are vital tools in establishing what can be done with certain documents, where, and by whom.

In a survey of 52 heritage railways, line associations, museums and archives, 63.8% of respondents reported having some form of formal policy regarding their archival collections. The definition of a “policy” was left somewhat vague, however, and policies ranged from formal documents meeting the standards set out by *The National Archives* and specific holding institutions to assertions that the archive will “only accept items within the geographical field of the branch line”. Results are further skewed by the disparity that exists between the three types of institution covered by the study: Line associations, heritage railways and museums/archives.

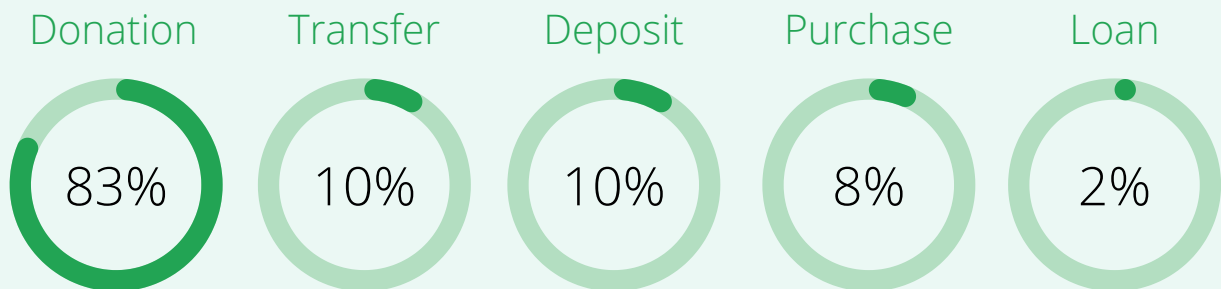


# The Numbers

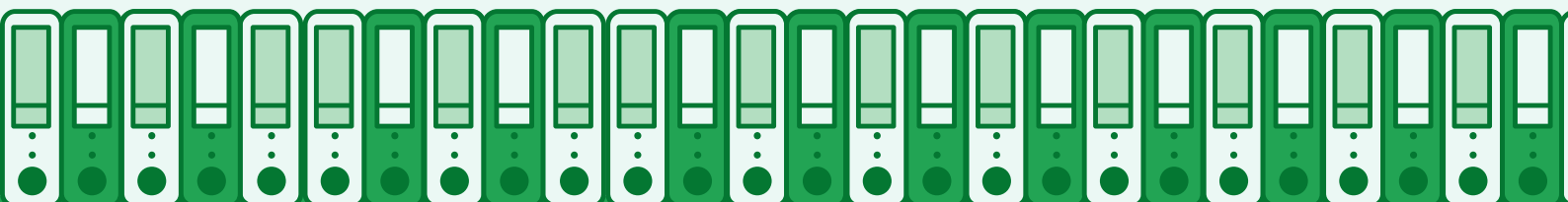
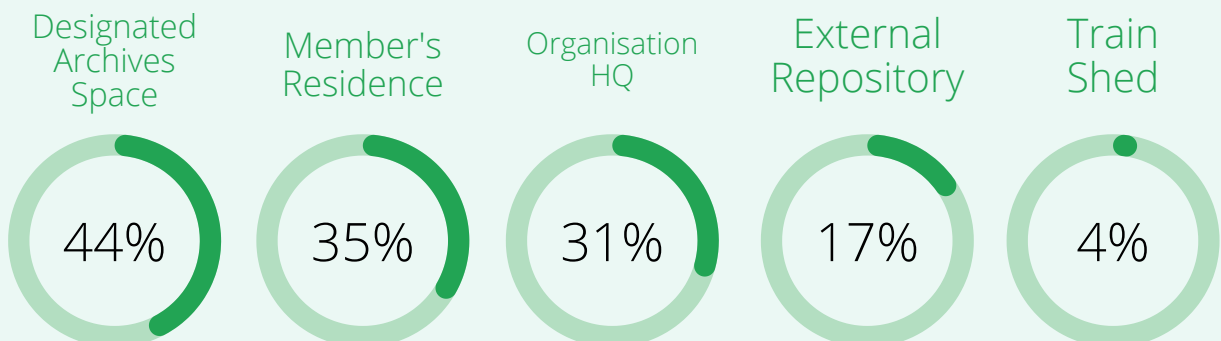
**36.2% of respondents reported having no formal policies regarding archive collections. 63.8% had formal policies.**



**When asked "How is the majority of your archival material acquired?", responses were as follows (where % refers to the percentage of organisations listing that item among their main acquisition methods):**

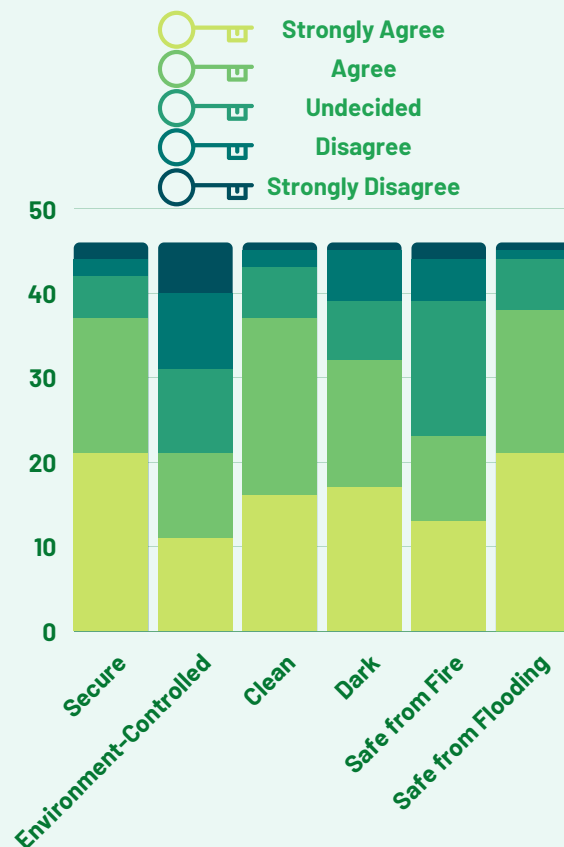


**"Where are your archival collections held?"**



## When asked about the conditions in which collections were stored...

- 83% agreed or strongly agreed that their archives space was safe from flooding.
- 81% agreed or strongly agreed that their archives space was clean.
- 81% agreed or strongly agreed that their archives space was secure.
- 70% agreed or strongly agreed that their archives space was dark.
- 54% agreed or strongly agreed that their archives space was safe from fire.
- 49% agreed that their archives space was environment-controlled.



## Museums and Archives



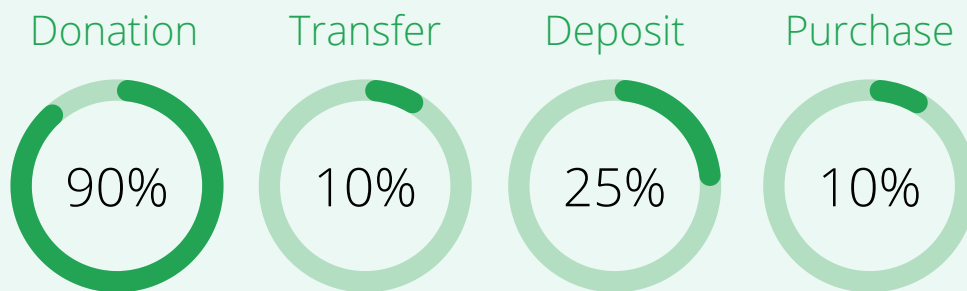
### Ahead of the Curve

Railway museums and archives accounted for more than half of the “large archives” (collections of more than 8,000 items, 400 boxes or 100 linear metres) surveyed and are largely ahead of the curve in terms of archival policy and practice.

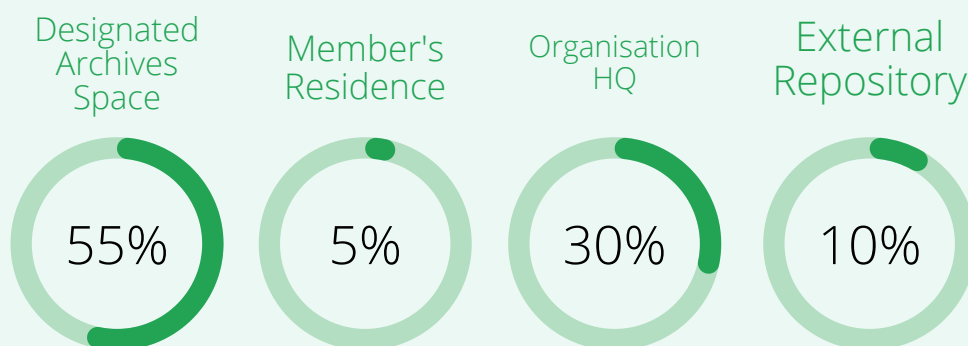


All of the organisations surveyed in this group had formal policies including catalogues, donations and bequests policies, withdrawal and access policies, policies on collections development, collections care and public engagement/outreach. A number of the respondents were accredited archives and museums meeting all the necessary criteria set by The National Archives and similar bodies.

When asked “How is the majority of your archival material acquired?”, responses from Museums and Archives were as follows (where % refers to the percentage of organisations listing that item among their main acquisition methods):

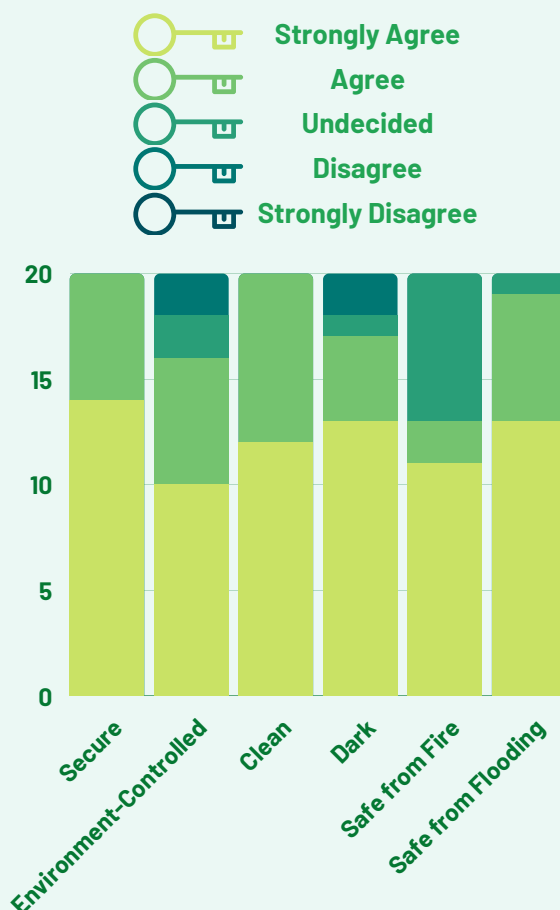


“Where are your archival collections held?”



When asked about the conditions in which collections were stored...

- 100% agreed or strongly agreed that their archives space was secure.
- 100% agreed or strongly agreed that their archives space was clean.
- 95% agreed or strongly agreed that their archives space was safe from flooding.
- 85% agreed or strongly agreed that their archives space was dark.
- 80% agreed or strongly agreed that their archives space was environment-controlled.
- 77% agreed or strongly agreed that their archives space was safe from fire.

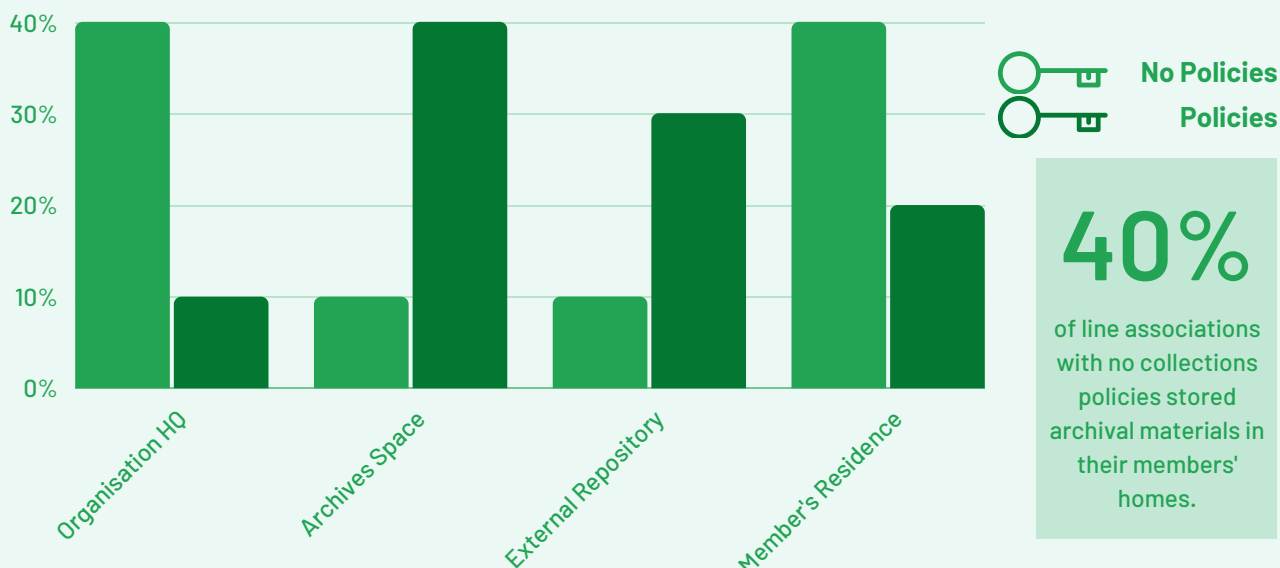


# Line Associations

56% of line associations surveyed reported having set policies regarding their archival collections, but just 38% described policies outlining the archive's scope, acquisition and access policies. The lack of formal policies in the remaining 44-62% of organisations appears to be connected to wider difficulties in the storage and management of collections.

## Collection Storage Vs. Archival Policies

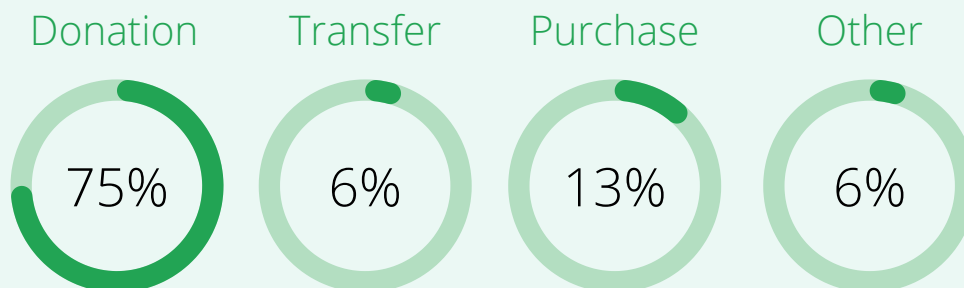
A chart comparing collection storage locations in line associations with and without formal archives policies.



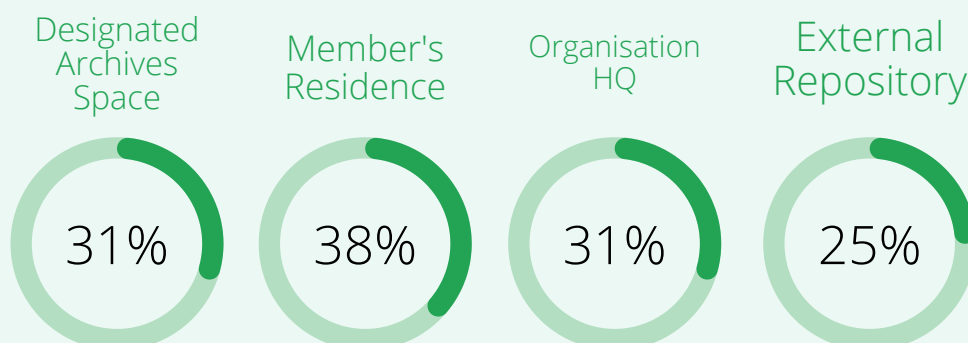
Among survey respondents, the majority of organisations who reported archival policies (of any degree of formality) stored their archival collections in their own designated archives space or at an external repository. Organisations with no policies were more likely to keep their collections at their headquarters or a member's residence. All but one of the organisations with no policies reported that their archives weren't accessed regularly, a problem which was not reported by any of the organisations with archival policies.

**38%** of Line Associations reported having formal policies outlining the archive's scope, acquisition and access protocols.

When asked "How is the majority of your archival material acquired?", responses from Line Associations were as follows (where % refers to the percentage of organisations listing that item among their main acquisition methods):

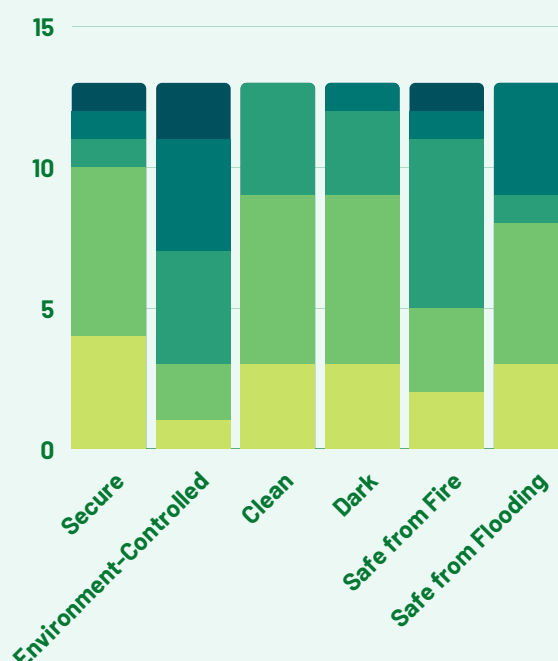


"Where are your archival collections held?"



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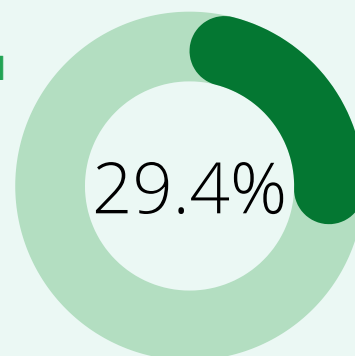
- 77% agreed or strongly agreed that their archives space was secure.
- 69% agreed or strongly agreed that their archives space was clean.
- 69% agreed or strongly agreed that their archives space was dark.
- 62% agreed or strongly agreed that their archives space was safe from flooding.
- 39% agreed or strongly agreed that their archives space was safe from fire.
- 23% agreed or strongly agreed that their archives space was environment-controlled.



# Heritage Railways

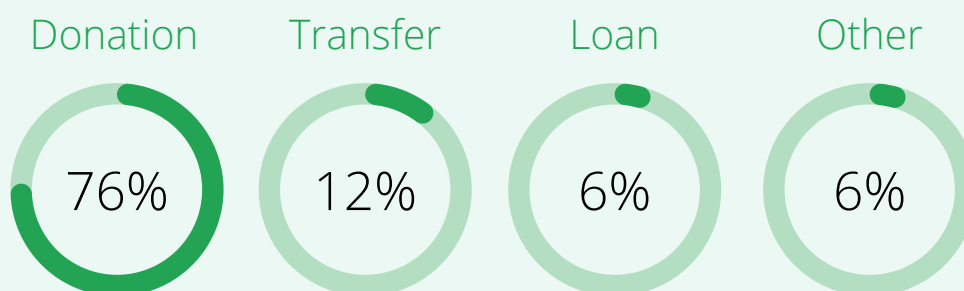
Just 35.3% of heritage railway organisations who completed the survey reported having policies concerning the management of their archives.

That percentage is further reduced to 29.4% if only formal, accreditable policies are counted.



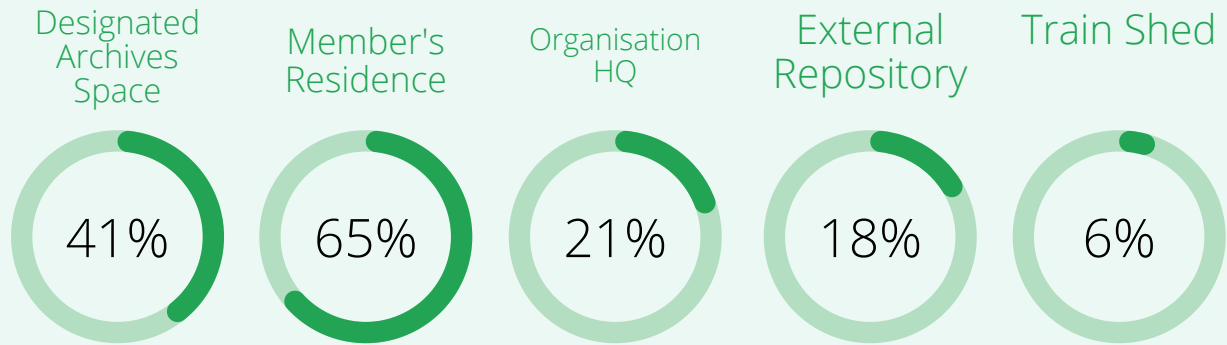
- Heritage Railways with formal policies were most likely to store their archives in the organisation's designated archives space (45.5%).
- Those without formal policies were most likely to store their collections at a member's residence (50%).
- 28.6% of Heritage Railways with archival policies reported that their collections were not accessed regularly, while 70% of archives without policies reported this problem.
- Just 14.3% of collections with policies and 0% of collections without policies reported regular access by anyone outside of their organisations. This suggests that the root of the access issue is likely to lie somewhere other than archival policy.

When asked "How is the majority of your archival material acquired?", responses from Line Associations were as follows (where % refers to the percentage of organisations listing that item among their main acquisition methods):



**70%** of Heritage Railways without archive policies reported that their collections were not regularly accessed.

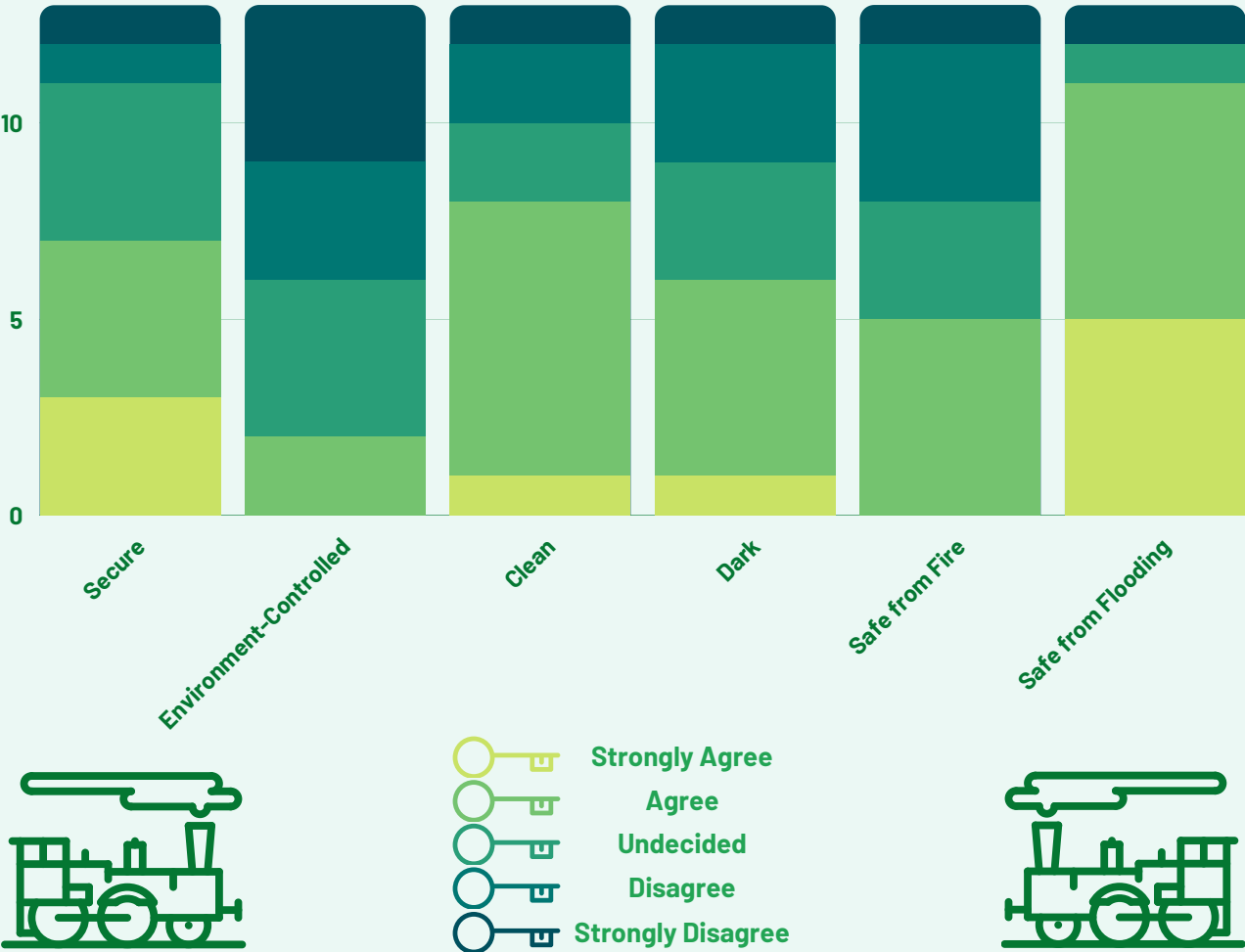
### "Where are your archival collections held?"



### When asked about the conditions in which collections were stored...

- 85% agreed or strongly agreed that their archives space was safe from flooding.
- 62% agreed or strongly agreed that their archives space was clean.
- 54% agreed or strongly agreed that their archives space was secure.
- 46% agreed or strongly agreed that their archives space was dark.
- 39% agreed or strongly agreed that their archives space was safe from fire.
- 20% agreed that their archives space was environment-controlled.

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# Why Does It Matter?

As previously mentioned, archival policies are a vital tool in the management and promotion of archives, and are no less important in a small, local archive than in a large, mainstream archive. The absence of archival policies will also affect an organisation's eligibility for Archive Service Accreditation, a scheme which "helps archive services to demonstrate their value by externally validating and accrediting achievement and supporting improvement." [2]

While not essential, Archive Service Accreditation may make it easier for an archival service to attract funding and collaboration, as it enhances the organisation's credibility.

Many of the respondents in this survey would not currently qualify for archival accreditation owing to the small size of their collections, but those without formal policies would still fail to meet standards if their collections were to grow to an accreditable size.

Accreditation by the Accredited Archive Service requires that the archive meets a number of standards, many of which refer to the use of formal archival policies:

01

## Requirement 1.1

The archive service is guided by a mission statement that defines its purpose in relation to its collections, and connects the organisation's governing document to appropriate archive service policies and plans. [3]

02

## Requirement 2.1

The archive service has a co-ordinated approach to collections management activity, guided by coherent policies, plans and procedures. Policies should cover both analogue and digital materials, where relevant, and be approved by top management, or an appropriate delegated authority. [4]

03

## Requirement 3.1

The archive service has a clear policy on access and engagement, which specifies the ways in which access is provided and enhanced for all stakeholders, appropriate to the organisation's mission statement and the nature and scale of its collection. The policy should be approved by top management, or an appropriate delegated authority. [5]

Even in organisations with no interest in archival accreditation, policies are essential. They make it possible for an organisation's archivist to manage and maintain the collection in the most efficient, effective way possible, and improve ease of access for those interested in the material held in the collection – not just members of the holding organisation. These reasons for policy development are common to all organisations that hold archival material, however certain unique factors of the heritage railway industry make formal policies even more important.

The heritage railway community has a great number of members, many of whom may be described as highly knowledgeable enthusiasts eager to build their own collections and carry out their own research. The ready availability of historical railway records and artefacts in auction houses across the country means that these personal collections may be just as likely to hold important and valuable documents as the collections of a heritage railway or line society.

Inevitably, these members will eventually grow old and no longer be able to manage their own collections, either as a result of re-housing or – unavoidably – mortality, and they must seek an organisation or institution to whom they can donate their lovingly curated collections. As one contributor explained:

*I am undecided as to where I should direct my collection of railway ephemera when the great day comes. Clearly I won't be around at that point and I know my surviving family will not particularly warm to the idea of welcoming someone who will be a total stranger into their home at that time. Indeed I suspect the preference would be simply to bin it all... I suspect I am not alone in facing this problem and altogether there may well be a significant number of artefacts where their very existence or adequate safeguarding beyond the owner's death might be in some peril. It would seem to me useful if relevant historic groups had a more formal and better understood system whereby it could be adequately acknowledged and more clearly understood where particular material was to be going and exactly how to make contact at the appropriate time.*

The collector-curator does not wish to donate their collection to an organisation whom they do not trust to treat it with adequate care and consideration. If an organisation does not have archival policies which are clearly expressed and openly communicated, there is no way for a potential donor to know how their collections will be treated on arrival at the archive.

If an organisation wishes to grow its archival collections through donations and bequeathments, they must first undertake the work necessary to inspire confidence in their would-be donors and benefactors.

# Recommendations

As the above examples illustrate, there is a strong correlation in this industry between archival policies, access and conditions, in that archives which had formal policies were more likely to have their collections accessed regularly and more likely to store their collections in an appropriate space such as a designated archives space or an external repository.

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## Struggling Archives: Take Action!

Organisations struggling to manage and promote their collections can begin to improve their practice by drawing up formal policies for their collections.

02

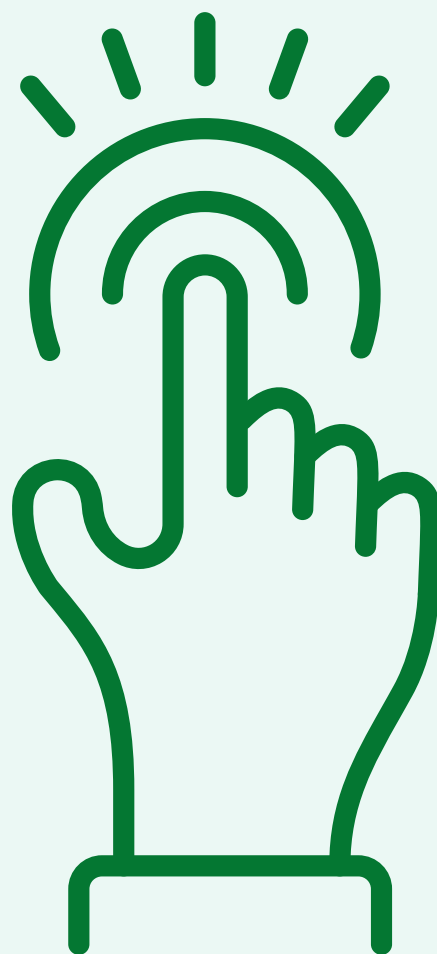
## Industry Leaders: Step Up!

Larger organisations and industry leaders could support a drive to improve policy in this area by releasing guidelines and resources specific to railway collections.

03

## Know Your Resources

Some organisations (such as The National Archives) are already making guidelines and resources on this topic freely available.



“Archives are not ends in themselves but have as their purpose the preservation and retrieval of evidence of the past which has continuing value to the present”

– David Bearman, Documenting Documentation

[6]

# Resources

When creating policies for your archive collections, the following resources may come in handy:

## British Library Preservation Guides

*Building a Preservation Policy* <<https://www.bl.uk/conservation/guides>>

## The National Archives

Archive Principles and Practice: an introduction to archives for non-archivists  
<<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/archives/archive-principles-and-practice-an-introduction-to-archives-for-non-archivists.pdf>>

Developing a Collections Information Policy  
<<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/archives/developing-a-collections-information-policy-march-2016.pdf>>

Writing a Collections Development Policy and Plan  
<<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/archives/writing-a-collections-development-policy-and-plan.pdf>>

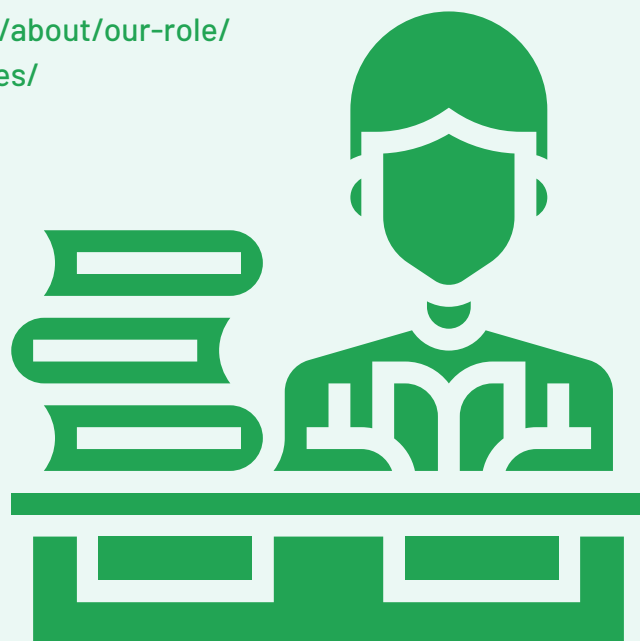
Digital Preservation Policies: Guidance for archives  
<<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/information-management/digital-preservation-policies-guidance-draft-v4.2.pdf>>

TNG's Policies: <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/about/our-role/plans-policies-performance-and-projects/our-policies/>

## Community Archives and Heritage Group

Cataloguing guidelines for community archives  
<<https://www.communityarchives.org.uk/content/resource/cataloguing-guidelines>>

All CAHG resources:  
<https://www.communityarchives.org.uk/resources>



# References

1. Millar 2010, pp. 59.
2. Thomson and Tullock 2014.
3. AAS 2018, pp. 3.
4. Ibid. pp. 7.
5. Ibid. pp. 11.
6. Bearman 1992, pp. 35.

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Accredited Archive Service (AAS), *Archive Service Accreditation Standard* (Surrey: AAS, 2018), in The National Archives, <<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/archives/archive-service-accreditation-standard-june-2018.pdf>> [accessed 18 July 2020].

Bearman, David. 'Documenting Documentation', *Archivaria*, 34, (1992), 33-49.

Millar, Laura A. *Archives: Principles and Practices*, ed. by Geoffrey Yeo (London: Facet Publishing, 2010).

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Oweghoro, B.M., 'Health records retention and disposal in Nigerian hospitals: survey of policies, practices, and procedures', *African Journal Libraries, Archives and Information Science*, 25.1, (2015), 69-76.

Thomson, Katrina and Janice Tullock, *Archive Service Accreditation Standard*, 2014 edn (Surrey: The National Archives, 2014).



# Acknowledgements

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(2020)

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Keith Harcourt - Academic Liaison & Education Officer, HMRS.

Mike Rogers - Land Transport Archives Network.



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